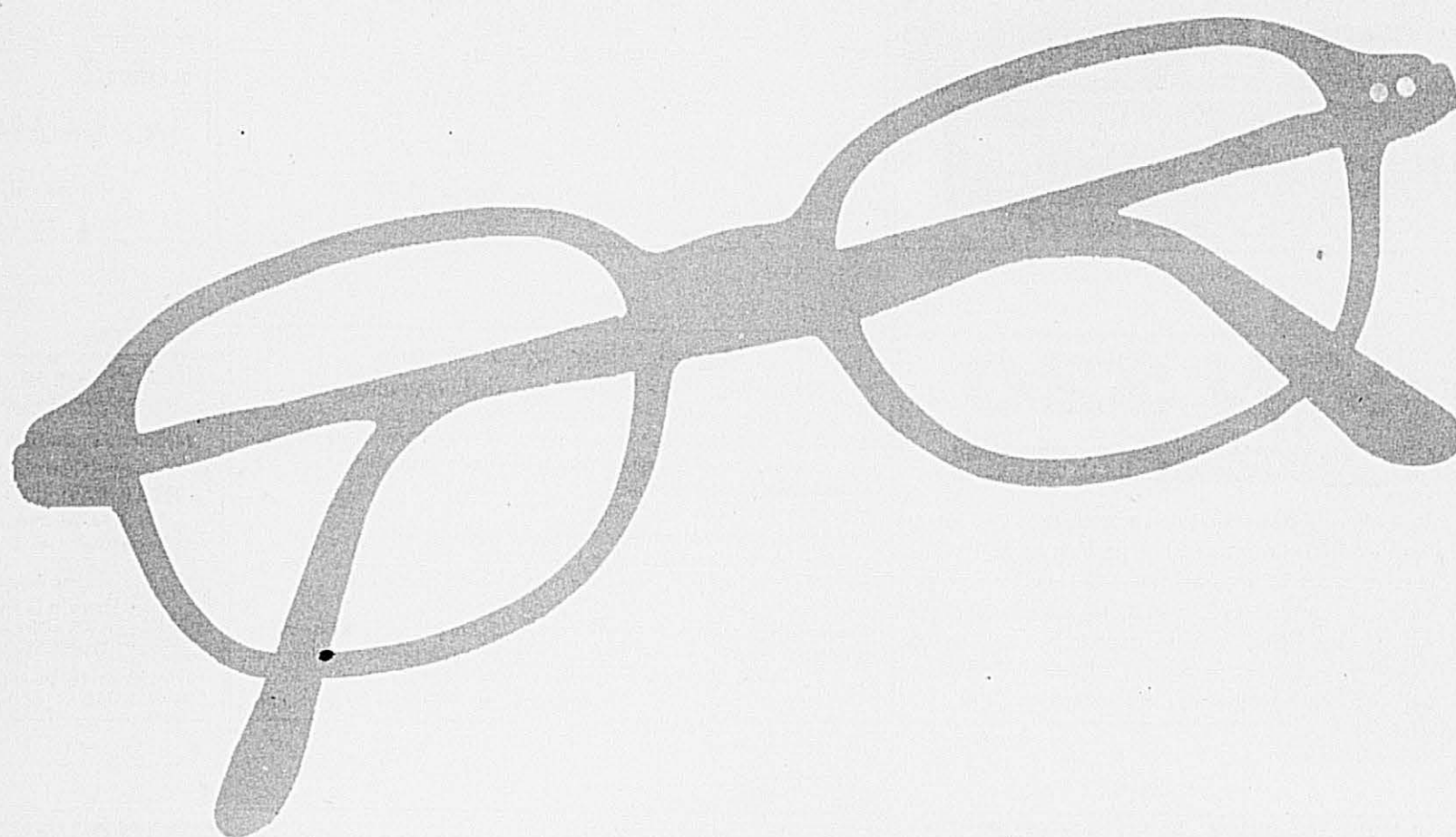


canadian literature



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capturing diversity

When it was decided that we should publish a Canadian Literature issue, it was implicitly understood that the issue would not attempt to be "complete," in any sense of the word. Can Lit covers a tremendously broad range of essays, poems, short fiction, novels, epistolary writing, and other, more numerous forms of literature than can be (or will be) named here. So it was inevitable that there would be areas of Can Lit which would be neglected in the content of this issue.

That having been said, what does appear herein represents

a wide range of Canadian writers; from historical fiction, to speculative fiction, to humour, to poetry. Authors are covered from across the country (yes ... I know that Montreal-Toronto-Vancouver isn't really across the country ... but anyway), including a smattering of original content.

In the first line of our Statement of Principles, our stated goal includes the intention to act as "a critical and constructive forum for the exchange of ideas." Our special issues are an outlet for this to occur in a focused manner on a specific topic. They allow coverage of one theme in a broader way than it may be possible in our regular production.

Hopefully the content of this issue will provoke some thought; hopefully some of you will buy (or at least read) one or two of the books we reviewed. Though there is no pretense of embodying Canadian Literature in these sixteen pages, hopefully we'll succeed in making a meaningful contribution.

Louigi Addario-Berry
co-coordinator, Canadian Literature Issue.

measuring identity?

I'm not sure being Canadian means anything. The Canadian, teenage jocks who flexed their muscles in my mandatory gym class of highschool, raved about hockey and beer, and cut their hair short-on-top, long-in-the-back seem appropriately distant from any sense of self I had then, or have developed since.

The reserves adjacent to the largely white community of my small town B.C. birthplace, certainly didn't embody the same glorified Canadian existence that Wayne Gretzky laughs about with Don Cherry on Coaches Corner.

What's my point. The point is I'm not even sure. There no monolithic entity draped on the walls of the new monsters (Indigo and Chapters) that represents some - even vague - notion

of Canadian consciousness. Why did we even do a Canadian Literature issue? Perhaps we needed a title.

In any case, here it is. If its aim was to represent something "Canadian" about Canadian literature I think it did fabulously in failing horribly. The content herein is a slab of what might be considered having originated from, represented, or died in this arbitrary, geographic piece of the planet. I don't think it could ever conceivably represent what anyone thinks Canadian literature is or ought to be. But that wasn't the point. Hopefully, the fragment we pulled out is a healthy one. It does not claim to represent anything larger, however.

- Jeff Webber
co-coordinator of Can Lit issue

comments

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THE MCGILL DAILY

postcards and torches

FICTION BY JEFF WEBBER

The wind hit hard like life on his chest. Late fall in Montreal, and the rubber tires of his cheap mountain bike groped for the pavement like a newborn tugging at a grown up's sweater. He felt good on his bike. High-school was over for good. His thin, shapely legs that he'd been taught to hate, felt strong today as he moved like water over the city streets.

103, 105, 107. The steps leading up to 207 looked

Mrs. Johnson." John heard some faint foot steps nearing the door.

Dark. Dark like she'd already reached hell. Lonely like she imagined hell would be lonely. It wasn't warm like hell, though. Lynda Johnson knew she wasn't in hell because the cold reminded her. Beneath her shawl and her knitted sweaters. Beneath the weight of age and the sometimes soothing televangelists, her goose bumps reminded

a knitted gray sweater wrapped around her small, frail shoulders. "You're John from Meals on Wheels? You've got a meal for me?" came the hesitant voice from Lynda's mouth. She looked up at the tall, but girlish figure, and the long, bright red dread locks that comprised John. "Would you like me to come in Mrs. Johnson? I can fix this up for you and make sure everything is O.K. before my next delivery."

A smile came across Lynda's wrinkled face. "You haven't come by for weeks John. Do you want tea? I can make you tea."

"I was here on Monday Mrs. Johnson. Today's Wednesday. Lucy came by yesterday. But I come by to see you every Monday and Wednesday. It's our special time Mrs. Johnson. I really look forward to it," John said to her as he made his way into her kitchen with a plastic, tupper-ware container in his hands.

It'd been three months since John rid himself of Red Deer, Alberta and the high school that tortured his world with the touch of which only humans are capable. "The limp wrist marks the fag," he was told by his P.E. teacher as he was instructed how to properly shoot a basketball. Locker rooms emanated the same enduring love, as John suffered blows from accidentally tossed bars of soap. Cowering from the common showers where the teenage males paraded their identities through the size of their cocks. Faggot. Faggot. Faggot. Sunk into John like blackened saliva from an incomprehensible devil. Faggot grew in him like a cancer. His sweat, and shit and tears could not shed the rape of his youth. Montréal. Montréal was far away. Anonymity. Hope.

John had read about Meals on Wheels in a magazine one time when visiting Vancouver. Within a week of arriving in Montréal John was biking food to the elderly and slowly aban-

doning the pain of his adolescence. He'd discovered the scope of his cancer in humanity. He'd learned it wasn't cancer. He was beginning to identify the shallow pools of fear in the eyes of his persecutors. He was beginning to understand that no one understands. But anomalies surfaced in his mind like physical irritants churning in his intestines, percolating through his anatomy, 'til he was overcome with heat, and blood, and what seemed like madness. Fragility still creaked in his bones like an audible moan, but what he now noticed was the corresponding futility in the efforts of everyone else.

"It's lasagna today," John told Mrs. Johnson heartedly, as he placed the tupper-ware container into the microwave and set it on two minutes.

"Would you like tea? We should sit and have tea, this I am sure of. If you'd be kind enough to stay for tea as I eat my lunch?" Mrs. Johnson subtly pleaded to John, apparently unaware of anything he

lasagna on the coffee table in Lynda's small living room. Lynda was already perched on the edge of the couch fumbling for something in the pocket of her sweater. The tea pot and tea cups had also been set out. John reached for the ancient pottery, handling its body and spout cautiously. Lynda interrupted his movements with her trembling fingers, "It's still got to steep. It's only been in there a minute." John settled back into the couch. He'd already been working a few months at Meals on Wheels, but he still hadn't adapted completely to spending time with the elderly. He found he felt more comfortable dropping the food off and then leaving shortly after. This bothered him sometimes, but if he didn't analyze it too excessively he could convince himself that he was genuinely helping these old people.

Lynda found what she was searching for in her sweater. She pulled two cigarettes from her pack and extended

Food does not fall from our mouths. The starry eyes of the elderly don't really see anything. They're already dead. Us and them. Life and death. The voices of dead husbands of world wars that comfort their widows through the frames of their photographs. These voices are illegitimate. Your life is untruth.

steep and long, especially for someone as old as Mrs. Johnson. He thought she must have been in her 90s; maybe even passed a hundred. "Christ," he thought to himself as he bounded up the stairs, "that's me in like 70 years." He envisioned her wobbly, decrepit knees struggling up the stoop, that looked more like a ladder. He thought sometimes this city seemed rabid, set to chew on the exposed and isolated.

"Mrs. Johnson," John called quite loudly. Knock. Knock. Knock. "Mrs. Johnson," he yelled this time. Ring. Ring. The brown and fading, second-floor apartment door stared back at him silently. Bang. Bang. John looked around. Down at his bike. Up at the sky. At the sick-green patio carpet outside all of the apartment doors. And back at the brown door. "Mrs. Johnson. It's John from Meals on Wheels. I've come to give you your lunch,

her she was alive. She was a human being, and she was quietly being in a world that took comfort in her transparency. Took comfort in the fact that apartment 207 locked tight. Reveled in the pseudo-existence of Wal-Mart and mall culture synthesis. Food does not fall from our mouths. The starry eyes of the elderly don't really see anything. They're already dead. Us and them. Life and death. The voices of dead husbands of world wars that comfort their widows through the frames of their photographs. These voices are illegitimate. Your life is untruth. Lynda Johnson looked out of the eyes that had presented her reality for 96 years. "I see my husband often and it's not just in photographs."

The sound of slippers creeping to the door got a bit louder. "Mrs. Johnson, it's O.K. It's John from Meals on Wheels. It's your lunch time. Do you remember me, John?" The door opened slowly revealing the 4'11" Lynda Johnson with

"The limp wrist marks the fag," he was told by his P.E. teacher as he was instructed how to properly shoot a basketball. Locker rooms emanated the same enduring love, as John suffered blows from accidentally tossed bars of soap. Cowering from the common showers where the teenage males paraded their identities through the size of their cocks. Faggot. Faggot. Faggot.

was saying, consumed in an effort to convince him to stay. To reaffirm her existence. To engage in dialogue. To experience human contact. To explain that she mattered. To deny her transparency, or as she would discover, to share with her his invisibility. John laid a plate of

her arm towards John. He smiled. Really acknowledging her being in front of him as a real person for the first time since he'd started delivering meals to her place. "Thanks," he

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Lynda replied warmly with an aged smile that had not often graced her face in recent years. John pulled out a lighter from his pocket, igniting the tips of both cigarettes. Lynda inhaled deeply. No ridicule for smoking at 96. No ridicule for feminine legs and red hair at 18. For a mo-

To reaffirm her existence. To engage in dialogue. To experience human contact.

ment the two of them just were. 20 minutes passed. Four cigarettes gone. Lynda and John had each had a cup of tea in silence. Finally, but it didn't seem like finally, the 20 minutes had been calm like floating face-up in a bathtub with your ears submerged, John spoke.

In 1974, Lynda Johnson's husband retired from a career in high-profile real estate. He'd made money, lost money so many times Lynda had grown used to the cycle. At the peaks the two bathed in the glory of influence and power. Lynda went to balls and dinners with her husband. Heard incessant praise for her husband's achievements in business, her husband's bravery in World War One. He was what they called a real man. Not many left these days, they said. She heard this and liked the ring, liked the glamour, basked in the light of a thousand manufactured smiles. She'd thought this is what it's like to be a real woman. Loved and adored just as her mother had been. The world had spun like clockwork, denied that pain was a word, fast and easy, perky and predictable, and it smelled good. It smelled as good as gold and glass.

In the low times, Lynda and her husband rarely spoke to each other. He'd get home from the office and ate the dinner that she'd made in silence. They didn't smile. It

wasn't real. They waited for the fragrant air of success to waft back into their cove. Too bad. Too bad Michael Johnson got ill when he did. When real estate crashed. When surreal dinners in a silent kitchen composed the evenings of the two aging partners. When smiles from banquets metamorphosed into loathsome condescension. Cancer had physically inhabited Michael Johnson's brain, but the poison of the growth spread like arsenic, until Lynda endured its wrath herself, as much as her own breathing sustained her physicality.

"Mrs. Johnson, I feel at home here. Like you know me. I think you know what it's like," said John. "It's like I was the epicentre of all that's evil. Like my breathing stoked their anger. Seething. They seethed in and out around me. Looked down on me. Touched me mockingly. Hit me with fists like I was responsible for any failures in their lives. Faggot. Faggot. Worthless faggot. Skinny-legged she-boy. Profane, Mrs. Johnson. Devil incarnate, Mrs. Johnson." Tears flowed down John's hairless cheeks, like Mrs. Johnson's patient, still body had opened a faucet in his memory. Poured forth like pressure from a pierced dam. John started shaking mildly, exhausted from the desperate release. Mrs. Johnson looked across the room at the peeling, yellow paint in the far corner. She sat there knowing.

John introduced himself to the director of Meals on

the 20 minutes had been calm like floating face-up in a bathtub with your ears submerged

Wheels as soon as he had found a place to live in Montreal. The director's name was Brad, an overweight man in his early thirties. He liked John immediately, noticing his need to give, his need to be-

long to something that could be meaningful. John began preparing meals in the kitchen at the Meals on Wheels centre, a run down building, but obviously cared for by its tenants. Brad led him through the Meals on Wheels agenda. The people preparing pasta, cleaning dishes, and talking to clients on the phone embraced his presence. Welcomed another set of eager hands to help feed and love the invisible old. Earrings and eyeliner on some of the men. Women with cropped hair and decisive faces. John fell headlong into a community.

After the cancer was discovered in Michael Johnson's brain, he gradually became more dependent on Lynda, less coherent when speaking, and incapable of saving his already plummeting business ventures. Lynda had him admitted into a retirement home which they could not afford, and she moved into apartment 207. Years fell into years, coalescing in timeless congruency. Michael's empty eyes reflected the white ceiling hovering above, as Lynda, weary and confused, stared down at the body and eyes that had been the pillars of her life. Sucked in and exhaled, the stagnant air permeated Michael's lungs with the aid of contraption on contraption of medical genius. The white corridors of the retirement home reeked of medicine and urine. No one talked to Lynda, because there was never anything to report on Michael's condition. Lynda peered at Michael's breathing corpse. She'd suddenly become old and voiceless.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Johnson. I can't believe I'm sitting here like a dribbling imbecile, I..." Mrs. Johnson interrupted the sentence, still facing the peeling corner, "I know pain, John." There was a pause, "I thought I belonged. We don't belong John. When you're here I'm warm, I belong." Lynda turned and struggled to lift a fork of lasagna to her mouth. John moved to help her, but she declined his assistance. Fiercely wrestling the world that insisted on forgetting her, she finished her lunch in-

dependently.

"It's like they understand. They're open to eccentricity. They've forgotten the rules, 'cause the rules don't apply. They're young again. Marginalized like the young and queer. The backwardness of the system shines the clearest when you're in exile," Brad told John over coffee and cigarettes, four months after John's arrival in Montreal. It was clear to John, within his first week at Meals on Wheels, that Brad was gay. He was confident and open. Proud and bold. Eventually John discussed his sexuality with Brad, something he never had dreamed possible as a teenager. Brad started taking him out some nights to introduce him to some friends in the queer community. These people laughed together, displaying their affection openly, willingly, authentically. John, for once, learned to feel legitimate when he was attracted to a man. He didn't vomit at his own immorality. He didn't shy away from mirrors.

"I know," John responded to Brad. "It wasn't just meeting people my age that were gay that allowed me to love myself. Mrs. Johnson and the others replenished some of my faith in humanity. The old are alienated like we are. You're born without a voice. Throughout your youth you're worthless and ignored, no matter what your sexual orientation. Then you reach that little void of significance if you happen to meet the criteria. You're thirty, your forty, your fifty. You're white, you're male, you're heterosexual. Right then you mean something. Then it gets all fucked up. You end up like Mrs. Johnson and you mean nothing. It's like you're not there. With us it's like we never get in. But, when I sit down with Mrs. Johnson she looks at me like I'm human. She didn't notice my dread locks when I first entered her apartment. We recognized desperation in each other's eyes. Together we meant something, you know, and it was all too clear that this whole monolithic culture is bullshit. We didn't need verification from some absolute morality. We were, you know, we fucking meant something.

I learned I meant something." Brad smiled at John.

"I feel exactly the same way. It's not until you're shoved outside so goddamn violently that your able to look in objectively and get physically ill at what it all means. The fear. The ignorance. The exclusionary stupidity. I feel sick right here thinking about it, but at the same time I feel good talking about it with you. And spending time with these elderly people who need you, and at the same time giving far

During the first few days, for the first time in his life, he was not intimidated, bullied or ignored.

more in return. It makes the fucking lunacy of this world almost worth it, you know?"

The empty plates, the tea cups, and the ashtray littered the coffee table. Lynda Johnson lit another cigarette, drained from the marathon of lunch. John sat motionless on the couch, unable to move although he was late for his next delivery. He wasn't thinking of what time it was. He wasn't even thinking. For a moment he'd tried to be rational. Tried to excuse his behaviour. But then it became evident that Mrs. Johnson had not recognized anything inappropriate in what he did and said. She'd just absorbed his anguish while staring into the corner of the room. She might not have been conscious of everything, or even anything definitive behind John's words. She simply felt the essence of his circumstance. Felt the humidity of tears and contorted insides rise in amidst the smoke. Her own pangs of solitude releasing silent nuances through the pores of her skin. Through the vacancy in her eyes. Through the bundles of wool that covered her tiny body. Something rose out of her. Melted with the sounds and fluctuations of the scene. The reciprocal needs of two people conjoining forces, repelling all rationale. As real as it gets.

Chattin' with Jay

The Barmaid's Brain

BY LOUIGI ADDARIO-BERRY

Jay Ingram



I was frustrated with the number of wonderful guest speakers at McGill last fall.

My frustration was not with the quantity of speakers, nor with their quality. Rather, it was with the fact that I missed every one of them. Stephen Jay Gould gives what was by all reports a fabulous lecture to a packed Fieldhouse Auditorium. (It's production night here at the *Daily* and I can't go.) Roger Penrose, one of Oxford University's leading intellectuals, lectures on the nature of the human mind. (I learn about it the day after it happens.) Stephen Pinker, head of the department of Cognitive Science at MIT and former McGill undergrad, comes to town. (I arrive at his lecture promptly at 7:00. The lecture was at 3:00)

Yet the great minds of the east may have hit upon something with the notion of yin and yang: for though I managed to miss a plethora of wonderful speakers, I also had the opportunity to speak with one of Canada's most humorous, engaging, and thought provoking writers.

I arrived at my interview with Jay Ingram late: due to typically poor

planning, I had left the acquisition of a tape recorder from ICC until the last minute,

and Murphy being who he is, there was naturally a lineup. So I found myself hurrying into the McGill Bookstore Café (cum Starbucks) at precisely 1:03, slightly out of breath, tape recorder in hand.

Ingram spotted me before I saw him: presumably because I was carrying his latest book, *The Barmaid's Brain*, under my arm. The book consists of a collection of stories, all non-fiction, all on some less explored, quirky, or somehow novel area of science and the natural world. His subject matter is amazingly broad: from the nature of laughter, to the learning capabilities of chickadees, to the possibility of building a tower into space. In all his work, his ideas are well documented, well researched, and infused with a mild humour that keeps each page as enjoyable as the first.

I shook hands with him, sat down, hit the "record-play" button on the recorder and promptly ran into technical difficulties. The recorder ran ... briefly. After about 10 seconds, it stopped, as though the tape had finished. Figuring I had put it in on the wrong side, I flipped it over and started it again. Again, 10 seconds, then it stopped.

Apologizing, I continued to try to figure it out, but to no avail. Ingram offered to give it a try: he had no better luck than had I. So, abandoning the tape recorder, I pulled out my pad and pencil - a technology which has yet to fail me.

Ingram has been a popularizer of science for many years. Before he began his current work at the Discovery Network, he was the primary personality on the CBC radio show "Quirks and Quarks."

So he's had plenty of opportunity to put aside facts and tidbits which make a good story.

"I've been collecting articles since 1973," he said. "When I see a column that looks interesting, I'll clip it, and start a file related to that story. As more developments or facts appear, I'll add to the file."

"Not everything ends up making an interesting story. Experiments fail, scientists change focuses, and public attention moves on. Some of my files I haven't added to in years ... then, all of a sudden, something new will pop up and I'll pull it back out. The ladder idea

is more than 30 years old, but with the discovery of buckminsterfullerene, there is a revived interest in it."

He referred to one of the stories in his book, in which he speculates on the possibility of building a tower to the moon, to a satellite, or some similar venture. Buckminsterfullerene is a molecule composed of 60 carbon atoms, with properties rendering it practically impervious to tension and compression. The book is divided into five sections, each with from three to five stories. There are a total of 21 stories in the book.

"The divisions are pretty arbitrary," said Ingram. "[The

stories] are just put in sections to give readers an idea of where they are. There's very little linearity to them: any one can be read before the others." I asked Ingram if any stories had been cut from his book which he would have liked to see remain.

(continued on page 15)

Ronald Wright

A Scientific Romance

BY LOUIGI-ADDARIO BERRY

Reading Ronald Wright's *A Scientific Romance*, I felt the weight of impending nightmares. Not the sort that come after reading a story of blood and gore and dead that walk about. Rather, the sort that come of realizing the immensity of humanity's plight, of contemplating the scope and breadth of the problems which continue to spring up, like mosquitoes from a swampy pond. AIDS. Global warming. Antibiotic resistant bacteria. Famine. Overpopulation. Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease.

Pardon? Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease?

Most of you have heard of it. Some of you may remember it. Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) is the human equivalent of mad cow disease. It is the reason we no longer import steaks from Great Britain and Hemo-Québec refuses to accept blood from the British. It is also the disease which afflicts the protagonist of this book.

Two things happen to the protagonist, archaeologist David Lambert, in close succession. The first is, through

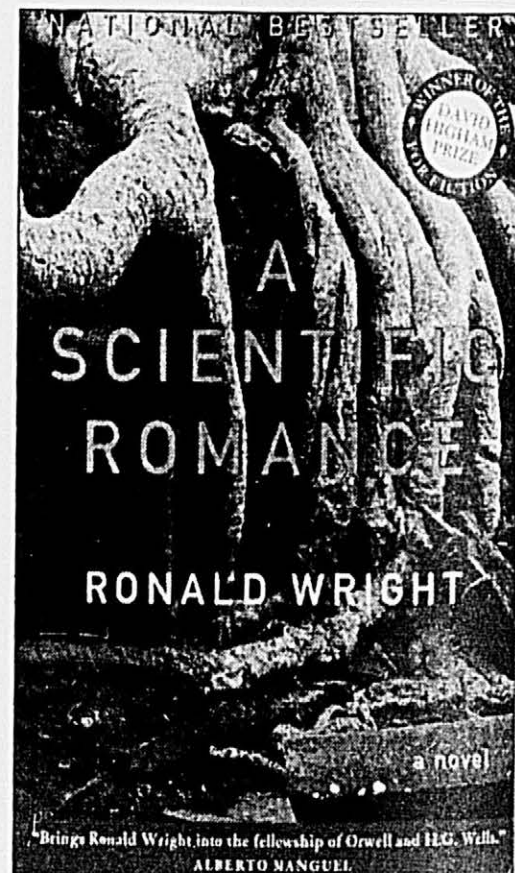
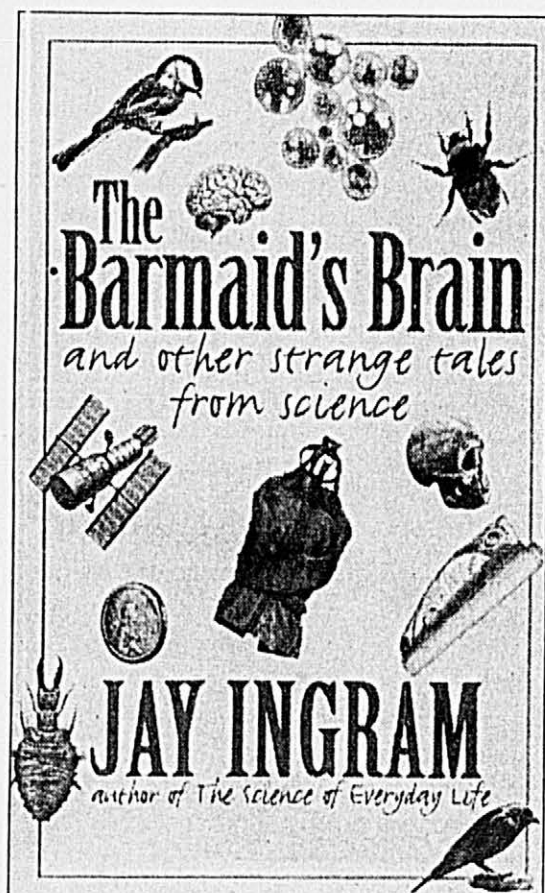
a hundred-year-old letter, his discovery of a time machine, "beaming in" to a run-down apartment in London on New-Year's eve, 1999. The second is the discovery that he suffers from CJD. These two findings, together with a tinge of the madness which comes with CJD already setting in, drive him to attempt a trip to the future, in hopes of finding a society far in advance of our own. In journeying forward in time, he expects to find a cure for his disease.

The future world is not one of spaceships and teleporters. The only science-fiction to be found in the book is that of the time machine itself. The world of 2501 is post-apocalyptic. Hu-

manity has been destroyed; nature has reestablished itself in its rightful place. London, the location in which he arrives, is overrun by vines, trees, and wildlife.

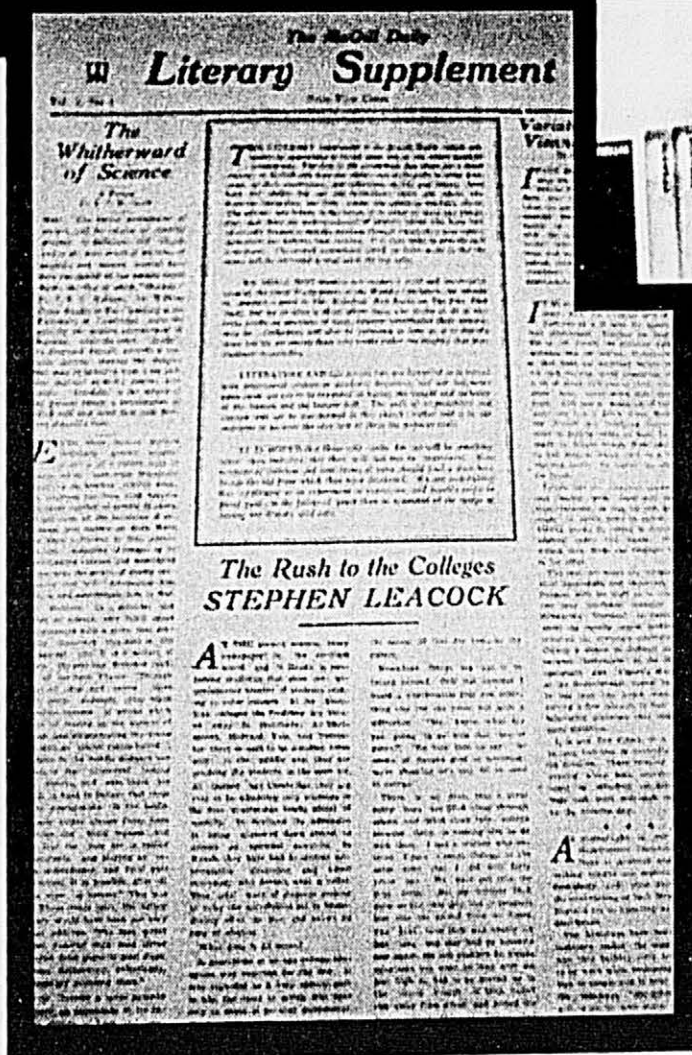
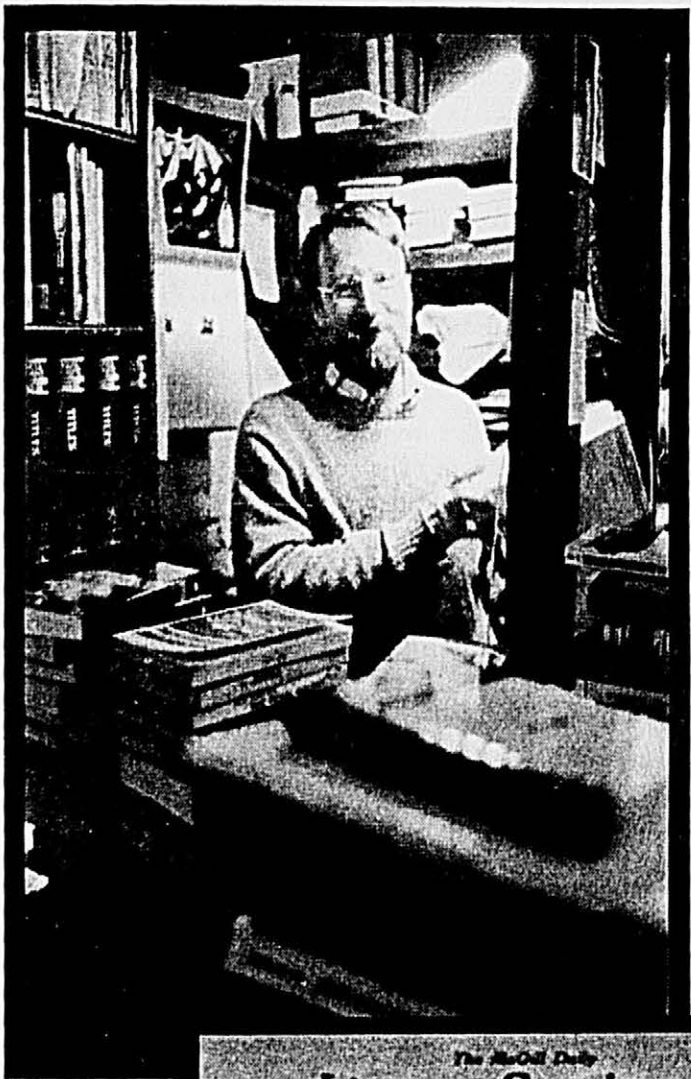
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canadian literature



food for thought

photos by céline heinbecker

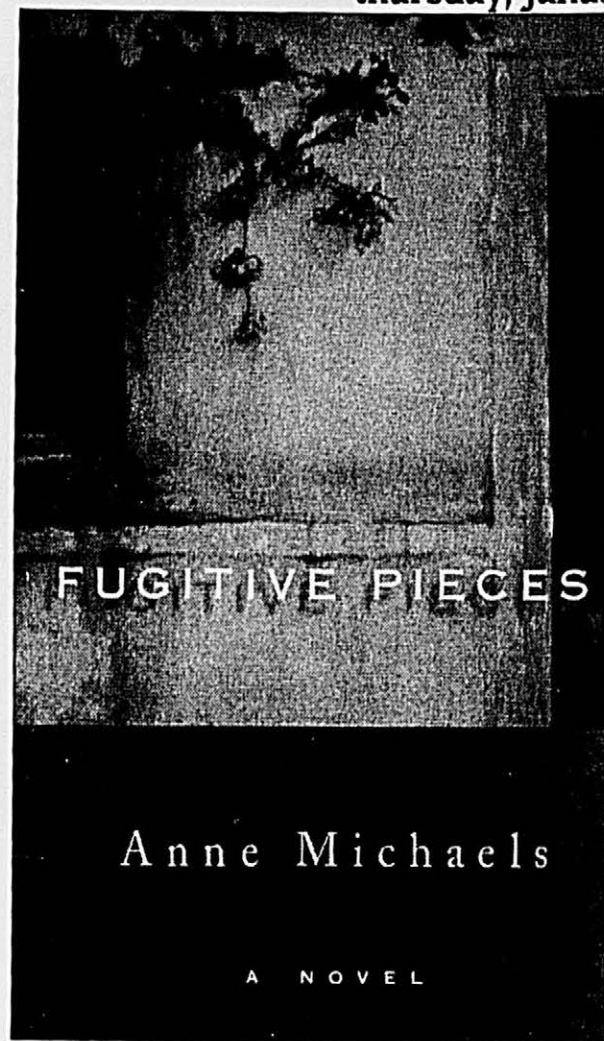


Fugitive Pieces

by Anne Michaels

Fugitive Pieces (McClelland & Stewart, 1996), the first novel by prize-winning poet Anne Michaels, won widespread critical acclaim and the Trillium Award. Michael Ondaatje observes that her poems "go way beyond games or fashion or politics...they represent the human being entire." The same could be said of her fiction. What, indeed, could be a more highly charged, saturated political topic than the holocaust? In our times, holocaust poetry seems barely possible. Yet the novel's language seems driven by a poet's desire to enter deeply into the simplicity and extremes of personal, sensual experience—perhaps especially in the face of unimaginable atrocities.

Reviewer Norma Rosen summarizes: "The substance of



Anne Michaels' novel is rendered through the sensibility of the traumatized boy, Jakob, who later records meditations on events in his journal. After the destruction of his mother,

lone digger.

"Here is the electrifying start of their encounter: 'I limped toward him, stiff as a golem, clay tight behind my knees....So hungry. I screamed into the silence the only phrase I knew in

father, and sister, Bella, Jakob flees to the ancient bogs of Biskupin and sinks himself into clay with the fossils, until one day he sees a

more than one language, I screamed it in Polish and German and Yiddish, thumping my fists on my own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew.'

"The digger is Athos, a Greek archeologist-geologist. Athos hides the boy under his clothes and takes him to his home on the island of Zakynthos. There they embark on the adventure of survival together, despite invader Germans."

A reader emerges from this trancelike novel with a sense of what it is like to feel fully human in inhuman circumstances.

Anne Michaels, who teaches creative writing and has composed music for theatre, spoke to me this week from her home in Toronto.

Stephen Dinsmore: A

friend gave me *Fugitive Pieces* when it first came out. Shortly after I read it, a friend in the States, someone I've barely seen in years, tracked me down because he knew I was living in Montreal, and he wanted me to send him six copies of your book to give to friends; it wasn't yet available there. Borrowed copies circulated among several people I know. So I started out seeing this book as a gift, something people want to give to each other. Did you have the sense when you were writing it that you were giving some kind of gift?

Anne Michaels: All writing, in a sense, is giving something and having no idea how it will be received. But mostly I think that I write because I need to find something out for myself. I need to learn something.

what, me eccentric?

An Interview

BY LOUIGI ADDARIO-BERRY

In my youth, I had certain staples. There were a few things which were so integral to my existence, so inherently a part of what was me, that it was inconceivable to go without.

Aside from the obvious - food, water, air, parental love and support, etc ... two immediately spring to mind.

- 1) Good books, and
- 2) the CBC

So it came as more than a small surprise to me that when I told my friends of the release of Bill Richardson's latest book, some of them responded with "Bill who?"

Granted, not many said this. Many of this nation's best and brightest were CBC children before they stopped drinking mother's milk. Nonetheless, there were those - casualties of an ever-growing TV nation, I suppose - who had never heard of the fellow.

So I decided - with at least a little self-interest at play, to be sure - that the task should be mine to enlighten them.

Bill Richardson is the host of Richardson's Roundup, a daily show on CBC One. The show airs both call-in requests, as well as snippets of particular interest from other CBC Radio programs. Another common feature of the show is a weekly theme, in which all are invited to call in and share their stories or ideas. It was in this way that the show gained its slogan, *Vox Populi, Vox Caprae* (Voice of the people, voice of the goat), a tribute to the show's phone number: 1-888-SAD-GOAT. The slogan is now emblazoned on all Roundup paraphernalia.

Richardson is also a writer of some note: he has won wide acclaim for his earlier books, *Bachelor Brothers' Bed and Breakfast*, *Bachelor Brothers' Bed and Breakfast Pillow Book*,

and *Bachelor Brothers' Bedside Companion*. His latest book, *Scorned and Beloved*, tells the stories of over five dozen Canadian eccentrics, through the quirky, somewhat eccentric eyes of Richardson himself.

I reviewed the book last fall in this publication, and had a chance to speak with Richardson last Tuesday.

Louigi Addario-Berry: The book you found, *Fifteen Thousand Useful Phrases*: do you still have it? (The story of the book's former owner is told in *Scorned and Beloved*. -ed.)

Bill Richardson: Yes, I still do: it's one of the few books I could readily locate. Although I don't make much use of it anymore. I've got another book by Grenville Kleiser as well, entitled *How To Prepare For Authorship*. It hasn't been quite as useful - I probably

should have studied it more ... But *Fifteen Thousand* is great, yeah.

LAB: Did you have it when you started the project?

BR: Yeah, I'd had it around for a couple of years. I found it at a flea market in Toronto, I guess around Kensington Market, and it just seemed to me to be so unlikely.

LAB: Unlikely?

BR: That it had been owned by this fellow, and that he had marked all the phrases with particular dates. It seemed great, because ... he must have done it because those were the dates on which he had used the phrases. It made me very happy to think about. Then, when I was traveling, quite by accident - I didn't

know I was going to be passing through Kenabec, Ontario, where he had lived - my route, in fact, did end up taking me through there.

LAB: When you saw the book, did you know immediately, 'I have to have this?'

BR: Yes, right away. Just one flip through, and finding some of those wonderful, extravagant, florid phrases that ... you can't get away with anymore. It spoke to me of another time, another sensibility.

Richardson uses the phrases, always in italics, sparsely interspersed throughout his book. Phrases such as *quaking and quivering like a short-haired puppy after a ducking*, *The room*

canadian literature

fugitives of terrible beauty

Anne Michaels

Usually a book will start with several questions that are really haunting me, that I have to try and come to terms with for myself. But in general, I think that I am writing because I want to learn how to live better. So there is a great degree of gratitude in the process for me, even at its most difficult moments.

SD: *Who were you writing Fugitive Pieces for? Was it partly for specific people toward whom you felt some gratitude?*

AM: All writing for me is a way of getting closer to what's important in one's own life. The book is not based on any particular, real person. The characters are all fictions. I've had an incredible response from survivors and children of

survivors, and readers in general; and I'm always incredibly grateful to people who actually take the time and energy and the effort to write, or to come up after a reading and tell me what they felt, and what the book meant to them. It's incredibly, inexpressibly gratifying. You work for a long time in absolute solitude, and you face a task that at times feels nearly impossible.

SD: *You chose such an overwhelming topic.*

AM: Yes. In all writing, in general, you have to befriend failure before you sit down; that's a given. You also have to have a real humility towards the material and towards the questions you're asking. I think failure is sort of built into it. It's

better to make a companion of it and befriend it, because it goes with the territory.

SD: *What were some of the questions that were haunting you when you started the writing?*

AM: There are a few things. It's not possible to grasp any historical event in its entirety. The only thing you can do is to ask some very specific questions and hope that if you can go deep enough down those particular questions, they will open up into a broader meaning.

One question had to do with faith, in the broad sense of the word. Is faith possible after the worst thing? Whether that's political catastrophe, social catastrophe, personal catastrophe. If so, what would

that faith be? What would it feel like, what would it look like? What would that faith be? When I started to work on the book I wasn't at all sure whether faith was possible. I vowed to myself that I would try and go into the material as unarmed as possible. In other words, without defending myself with a philosophical agenda, a political agenda, a psychological agenda. To try and go in, as near as one could, to just being a human being. And that's frightening, because you don't know whether you're going to come out the other side.

I also had specific questions about what I came to think of as split-seconds of history—like certain photographs. One that's mentioned in the book is the moment that was caught

in pictures many, many times, of soldiers or citizens laughing while they did terrible things. Just that moment of the laughing soldier: everything that led up to that moment, everything that follows that moment, everything that moment contains. You're looking at something—in this case, looking at photographs like that for ten years—trying to penetrate what on earth could have been going on at that moment. History and historical events are full of these split-seconds which you know somehow if you could penetrate you would get to the heart of something crucial—if only you could possibly decipher what was happening.

SD: *Sounds like the work of a poet.*

(continued on page 13)

with Bill Richardson

tic ardour of a generous mind, and into the purple sea the orange hues of heaven sunk silently.

Our discussion continues:

LAB: You said in the acknowledgments that Diane Martin, your editor, suggested the idea [of the book] to you. Did you take to it right away?

BR: I said yes pretty much right away, although I was made a little nervous by it. I don't often work with ideas that come from other people. I think there's more investment if what you're doing comes from your own head, your own heart. I suppose that had the idea of writing a book about Canadian eccentrics been my own, I would have dismissed it.

I would have thought 'it's already been done,' or 'it's evident what the book would be.' I didn't want to write a book that had too many people in it, which it could have been.

I didn't want it to be a collection of tiny inscriptions of people with a passion for gathering twine, or whatever. I wanted to write something a little more joined, a little more writerly; so that's what I did. It's a hybrid book: not exactly a travel book, not exactly a memoir, but a kind of melding of the three.

It worked for me: I don't think it worked for a lot of readers, but that's the way it goes. A book is kind of like a joke, in a way. When you tell a joke, the chance you take is ... that people aren't going to get it. That

some people will get it, and some won't. Certainly, with this

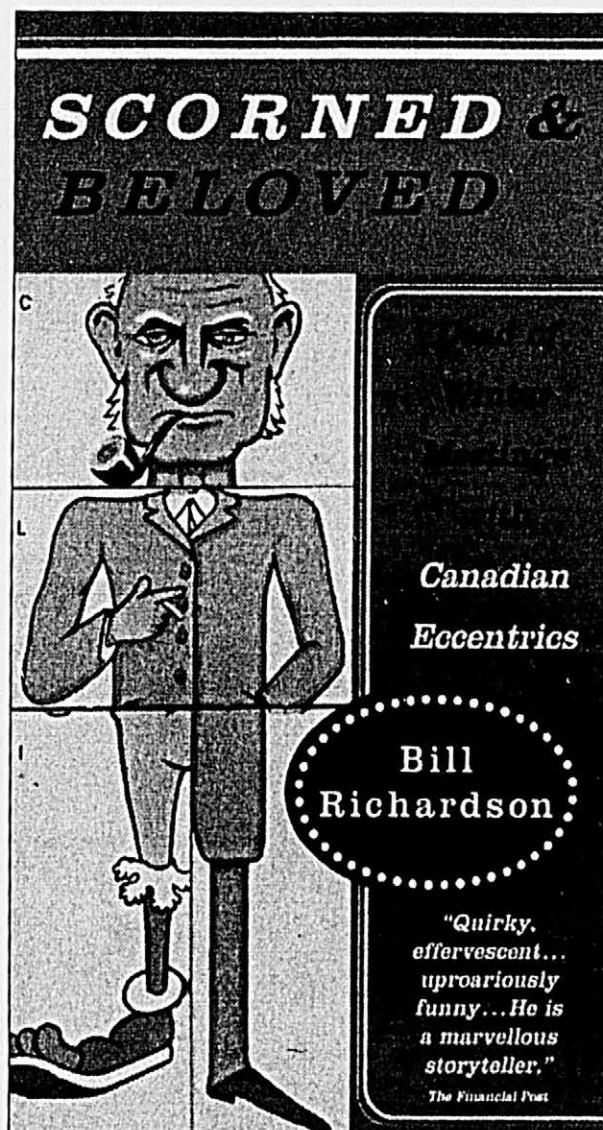
book, that's very much the case. I was very interested in that dynamic.

LAB: You cover a lot of ground in it. I guess there's a risk of losing readers along the way: it's such a diverse and eclectic group of people and places.

BR: Yeah, in the end I was really glad that the idea had been suggested, though.

LAB: For how long did the book end up taking you away from CBC, overall?

BR: Let's see ... at the time I was writing this book, I was



Scorned & Beloved

by Bill Richardson

hosting As You Like It. (A classical music request show on CBC Radio Two - ed.) I was gone for two months, I suppose. I left Vancouver at the end of December for St. Johns, and I came back to work around the 28th of February.

I wrote the book between March and July: I made it a point of writing the end on July 1st. It was a pretty intense period of involvement. What had happened before that had been mainly information gathering: I didn't really know when I set out quite what I was going to do, where I was going or what I was going to find.

LAB: You had most of the people located beforehand, though?

BR: Well, I had a huge number of suggestions. I knew there was a lot out there, but I (continued on page 12)

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COMMENT

a call for poetry in motion

BY BEN ERRETT

New York does it. London does it. As of this summer, even Toronto does it. Yet here in Montréal, a city which likes to think of itself as the cultural capital of Canada, we don't have poetry on the metro system. This may seem like a trite complaint; a simple detail in the artistic life of a city. However, two important facts must be taken into account. The first is that much of the artistic expression of our city, province, and country, has been in the form

of poetry. In both French and English, the poetry of Gilles Vigneault, Leonard Cohen, Gérard Godin, A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Michèle Lalonde is all distinctly Montréal. The second fact is that most Montréalers, and indeed Canadians, have not read these authors.

A "successful" book of poetry sells 500 copies nationwide, to a potential audience of 30 million. Where the Canadian novel has flourished over the last half-century, Canadian

poetry has remained in relative obscurity. Add to this the linguistic divide in Montréal, and it is apparent that much of the poetry produced in this city, even that which is critically acclaimed, will not be read by the masses.

This is why the concept of poetry on public transit makes so much sense. There are few more captive audiences than buses full of commuters on their way to work. Advertisers take full advantage of this fact. Our tax dollars already go to

the Canada Council and similar organizations at the provincial level with the mandate to encourage our artists. It seems perfectly logical to combine the poets in need of an audience and an audience in need of something to break the monotony.

The money is already there — a grant from the Canada Council to publish one book of poetry could be used to introduce a wide range of poets to Montréalers. Surely the MUCTC won't object; it could

use the good press a project of this sort would surely garner in the wake of the Nova bus disaster.

Of course, this being Montréal, the question of language must be dragged in. This city has produced a vast array of poets in both official languages, so it would only be proper to print poems which stem from both. Since it doesn't make much sense to translate poems, the poems could be printed in their original language.

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three canadians

Anne Joyce, Catherine Bush and Michael Turner at the Jailhouse Rock Café

BY REBECCA ROSENBLUM

I'm looking for Canadian literature. I've heard it said that by studying Can Lit I am making a nationalist statement; but I just want to know what it is. Do Canadian writers define the genre, or is it settings or characters, or is there really a Canadian consciousness? Maybe the best I can hope for is a sense of something indefinable, set on a backdrop of good writing. I'm looking for Canadian literature and I have brought a map, because I've never been to the Jailhouse Rock Café before. That, at least, turned out to be easy to find.

The walls were red and the Rhizome-presented show started late. Finally, the spotlight went on and the first writer was introduced. Anne Joyce is a Concordia student who plans to begin her master's program in Creative Writing next fall, after completing her B.A. this spring. Her poetry was fragile and shifting, revisiting the same images in different poems from different views. The pieces seemed to touch on frailty, pursuit, beauty, interpretation and misinterpretation: the visual and what we extrapolate from it.

late from it.

Each work was short and self-contained, though they were composed as part of larger cycles, and captured the attention of an interesting audience. Joyce then read from "Puddle Full of Sky", a short story.

The entwining of flashbacks to a Northern lake setting with the Montreal narrative pressed what could be called Canadian perspective without becoming overwhelming. The language of the narrative was as intricate as that in the poems, but the passage chosen seemed a bit slow-moving and lacking in meaning without its larger context. Nevertheless, Joyce's first-ever public reading can be considered a definite success.

Next on the program was Catherine Bush, a professor (Joyce's, in fact) at Concordia University. Bush is clearly at a very different point in the spectrum of professional writing, having received considerable positive press for her first novel, *Minus Time*, since its publication in 1993. She is in the process of completing her second, *The Rules of Engagement*, from which she also read. The passages read from

both books seemed to center on departure, although in *Minus Time* it was for space while in *The Rules* it was only for England. Read with humour and fluency, her fiction was elegant and perhaps as suited as any literature can ever be to being read in a bar. *The Rules* especially was tightly ordered and oddly gripping, detailing as it did a woman's moving to England, her jobs, her fears, her marriage and her research in the space of only several pages. The *Minus Time* reading was less consuming, for, like Joyce's, it had the beauty of language and of rhythms without the context.

Then Michael Turner took the stage. If the preceding authors had subtly illustrated through the potential and limits defining Canadian literature, Turner provided a good contrast with a blasting of Margaret Atwood's *Survival* for daring to posit that such a thing as Can Lit exists. He took this thesis a step further by bringing out his own *Survival* in an identically patterned cover jacket. The short book of poems had been created by deconstructing and rearranging the epigrams

Atwood used in her book. Though his methods seemed a bit too complex (and his reasoning too cranky) for this listener, the resultant poetry was fast, sharp and witty.

Turner then moved on to his poems from *Kingsway*, a collection devoted to the thoroughfare that runs diagonal to the Vancouver road grid. He first explained his love of things that run across norms, grids suited to bar-readings, sounding like a thoughtful machine-gun. I'd even almost forgiven him for his Atwood-bashing when we reached the final segment of his presentation.

This was a poem he'd been asked to write to be read over a film. He remarked that he hadn't liked the movies suggested and had selected his own, which turned out to be (wait for it) hard core porn, framed with some tracking shots of a highway taken by Turner's mom. Usually I have little patience with the "I can make anything into art" school of thought, but the poetry that accompanied the silent film was a thoughtful almost-narrative about people

on the screen, who they were, what brought them there, and where they were going. Although Turner couldn't resist a few of the stock jokes inherent to the genre (like what constitutes "professionalism" in a porn actor) the poem was able to stand for itself, even without the action on the screen.

All in all, Rhizome offered a lot for the \$2 cover. In addition to the readers, a cheerful, unbilled guitarist known only as "Ben" filled the (longish) gaps between performers. The MCs commented several times that they were thrilled with the full-to-overflowing audience. Rhizome now receives Canada Council money and they pointed out that this allows them to not only bring in famous writers from far afield but to financially encourage the local writers that they showcase. Of course I didn't find any clear definition of Canadian literature, but really, that's a lot to ask of an icy Sunday night.

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On Deer Crescent

FICTION BY REBECCA ROSENBLUM

I am walking down your street. I didn't come here to see you. I don't think I'd have the courage to do that now, though of course I would have once. I was already here, actually, standing on the sidewalk and doing up my scarf, when I realized that it is the street where you live.

Walking slow and snow falling on me, white as a snow ghost, after a while. The thick flakes fell fast and coated my hair and jacket and stuck and stuck, making me softly feather white. A snow ghost of myself, earlier me, wearing shorts and belonging on Deer

hadn't yet admitted to myself that I was. But I was. And I remembered.

I remembered that popsicle-sticky summer night when we sat on your front steps and waited for everyone else to come over the top of the hill. Do you remember?

yours and because you liked him, so he must have been ok.

So we sat on your cement steps, the three of us, waiting. You smacked your fist against your palm in that way of being impatient without knowing it but you were smiling and light anyway. We were drinking the Kool-Aid your mom brought out to us, in the glasses that she could bring out to the cement steps because they were plastic, painted with lady-bugs and vines. The dimming sunlight shone through the places not painted and cast red strange-patterned gleams on the iffy firmness of my white thighs. The Kool-Aid was watermelon but your mom had coral lipstick that was always smeared off to one side and a long blue skirt that wasn't wrinkled anywhere and I didn't say anything.

We sat on your cement steps, the three of us waiting until the others crested the hill and poured down like a wave of shaken beer. We all stood in your yard, ducking in and out of your house, drinking, talking, for so long I thought we weren't ever going to leave but we did. I was standing with my back arched away from the roses with their ladders for climbing and their thorns like nails or claws if they touched me. I was standing on one foot then the other then back bouncing on the spongy low-mown grass when you pulled on my arm and said it was time to go.

It was a long walk and you showed me where it was illegal to drink alcohol after dark, where you fell hard out of a willow tree and broke three fingers on your left hand

when you were eight years old, the well-windowed house where your English teacher lived. The sun was setting behind us, making your hair cast shadows on the pale of your face and your eyes looked so bright and so deep.

Then we climbed the big hill above the baseball diamond that you don't see from the road unless you're looking for it and only then if you twist your neck back and over your shoulder at the lowest place on the valley road. By the time we got to the top, grabbing for each other's hands and stumbling, we were panting and the Kool-Aid forgotten, sweat on the back of my neck like hot dew. Even though it was too warm for coats, some people had them and shared and we lay on those. So we lay there, the sleeves lumping under our backs and stared straight up at the sky, at the stars starting to show. We lay there all of us and talked about summer, work, guns, beer, candy, university, love, us, depending on who was doing the talking. We lay there and talked until the fireworks came and tore up the sky.

Now, with the thick snow crunching like candy under my feet and sticking thick in my hair, I can't recognize your house. They all look the same to me, though some have one more car or less, cleared driveways or not, drapes opened or closed. I know the differences must be more than that, but I can't see it. I can't see it. I can't find your house any more and my fingers are close with cold and my hair is frozen so it's time to go and what were we even thinking that night, anyway?

The Kool-Aid was watermelon but your mom had coral lipstick that was always smeared off to one side and a long blue skirt that wasn't wrinkled anywhere and I didn't say anything.

It was the willow trees and the cul-de-sac, but no, it was mainly the steep slope that the street takes, coming down from the main road towards where your house is.

I started to walk up, across the lawns when the snowdrifts had covered the sidewalk.

Crescent. Younger me, who moved faster without the thick heavy boots and slickness of sidewalk and the chocolate pudding drifts. I had reached the base of the hill when I realized that I had come too far if I was looking for your house, which I

You introduced me to your best friend, then, and he shocked me. He shocked me because he wore baggy olive-drab pants that gleamed like tent canvas under the sun and he knew how to fire a gun and he told me. Still, I liked him because he had a smile like

A Scientific Romance by Ronald Wright

(continued from page 6)

Lambert, in desperation, sets off in search of civilization. The story follows him, through his journal and his letters to an old (very old) lover, on his journey, along what once were highways, through Grantham, past York, Newcastle, and Edinburgh. On the way he puzzles together an idea of what happened.

Through graffiti scrawled on overpasses, fragments of letters found in what used to be schools, and a CD or two manufactured after he left - he brought his laptop to the future with him - he discovers that humanity has been wiped out by, among other things, the very disease that is killing him.

Apparently, in the not-too-distant future, our collective addiction to the "quick fix" will be our downfall. With the spread of increasingly cure-resistant diseases, and desperate famine in third world countries,

we find ourselves unable to cope with that which we have wrought. We leave the earth not with the bang of interstellar travel and exploration of brave new worlds, but with the whimper of plague, and death.

There are hints of some sort of military struggle, though whether the use of armed forces is domestic - to keep the population under control - or foreign - to keep the immigrants at bay - is unclear. Perhaps a combination of both. Lambert's travels finally take him to the Scottish Highlands, where he does, indeed, find that which he has sought.

It's life, Dave, but not as you know it.

The "civilization" discovered has a level of development marking a return to before-the-bronze age, with some small exceptions. The village discovered consists of no more than a few hundred people, practicing primitive subsistence agriculture; livestock are llamas and poultry, not much more. The villagers know no more

than stories about the world beyond. There is only one man who has even a primitive idea of how to read.

The rest of the story traces Lambert's attempts to further reconstruct the past (future); to figure out what became of us, who survived, and how, as well as his efforts to overcome the suspicion of the villagers as to his origin and to the truth of his tale. This I will not recount, in the interest of potential readers.

The book is well-conceived, well written, and is frighteningly convincing in its portrait of a barren future. The major weak link in the chain is the time machine: as it is a cliché which tends to present itself in the work of bad science-fiction authors, it makes suspension of disbelief in this story harder to invoke. This is overcome, however, by the quality of the prose, and the compelling image of our future spread out before us.

Recommendation: read in three nights or less. Stay up late if you have to.

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special issues:
get involved.

February 18th: Black History Month Special Issue

features, personal essays, reviews, interviews and creative pieces needed. come down to shatner b-03 to speak to verda soon.

March 8th: Women's Special Issue

come to the first meeting to discuss story ideas. february 4 at 4:30pm in shatner b-03. for more info, contact amy or anna in shatner b-03.

bill richardson speaks

BY LOUIGI LADDARIO-BERRY

(continued from page 9)

was also fairly certain that when I traveled, I would talk to people, and would hear about other people; that's certainly what happened. For instance, the story of Fred Sauer, in Charlottetown. I only heard about him once I went there: I didn't really have anyone in PEI. I just went there, talked to people, and the connection was made.

One of the things that seemed to be a weight that I carried when I was traveling and writing, was the awareness that there was a kind of inevitable arbitrariness about it. That's what I think comes down to in the end; any writing of this sort is just choice-making.

LAB: No matter how much you write about a person, there's really no way to fairly encapsulate a person's life, when it comes down to it. Anything less than living that life is bound to have a certain amount of arbitrariness to it.

BR: Absolutely. So, you understand that, and you hope that the people about whom you're writing will understand that as well. In the end, I think it's always going to be less than satisfactory, for that reason. You're taking terrible liberties.

LAB: How much convincing went on? The people you decided you really did want to be in your book: were most of them happy to?

BR: I didn't try to do any convincing. I just told people what I was about: that I was writing a book on Canadian eccentrics; that I wasn't quite sure what eccentric meant; that they were suggested by someone, and would they mind talking to me. In fact, only in one case did I ever encounter anybody who expressed resistance. In that case, I just moved on. It wasn't my business to try to convince anybody; I didn't have that much invested in any sort of universal inclusion. So no one, really. For the most part, people were flattered.

I was slightly alarmed a

while ago, when an obituary appeared on the back page of The Globe and Mail. Although I did most of the traveling in January and February, I had been to Newfoundland the November before. I was doing other things, but I decided to take a little time to see what was out there. Someone had suggested talking to this guy named Gilbert Higgins, in Stephenville, on the west coast of Newfoundland. Gilbert was a town archivist, of sorts. He was a teacher there, and had an old Newfoundland family. He had been pointed out to me as a good source of information about Newfoundland characters, and possibly as a character himself.

I went and talked to him: he was a nice guy, interesting, but no one you could pin down ... with everyone in the book, there's something quite specific about them that I could hang something on. With Gilbert, there was just a sort of generally oblique way of looking at the world. The point is, I didn't write about him: I just mentioned him in the acknowledgments. Then, in this obituary, it said & quote;although he was once profiled on Wayne Rotstead's On The Road Again, he was not considered eccentric enough for Bill Richardson's

LAB: The stories you didn't end up using: did you contact the people, to let them know?

BR: Yes. Many, many. They're all mentioned in the acknowledgment, as well. In

seem less than they were, somehow.

LAB: You don't plan to write a sequel, then?

BR: No: I'm kind of retired from the writing business, I



the final editing process, about 100 pages had to be cut; that was all in the last week before it was off to the printer. It was

think.

LAB: Just burnout?

BR: Yeah, kind of burn-out, and the fact that ... there are too damn many books in the world. It's so chancy as to what actually has a life.

LAB: I read a quote somewhere; someone said 'why spend years writing a book when you can buy one for a few dollars?'

BR: (laughing) Who said that?

LAB: Anonymous.

BR: I'm with them, 100 percent. There's so much out there, and so little that actually has a chance of doing anything. I never say never; if there was an idea I really wanted to work on ... I have several ideas, but ... the job that I do is very absorbing ... I try to do the occasional bit of newspaper or magazine writ-

ing, but at the end of the day, I'm exhausted.

At the end, although I was very happy with the book - and that should really be enough - I guess it is enough, it never really found an audience, found a life. The book sold reasonably well, but I was left with the feeling that it had made very little impact on the world. And that's what happens to most books. Unless something comes along that I really want to do, that I could take time to devote to it, that I felt was worthwhile in many different ways, I wouldn't do it. Right now, that hasn't occurred to me.

LAB: Back to the characters in the book: you say you had little trouble getting permission from people who were alive. The people who had passed away, however, did you try to get some sort of permission from friends, or relatives?

BR: I was never troubled in any way about that; when I set out I knew I would write about both the living and the dead. For the most part, the people are long dead; the only exception is Glenn Gould, who I felt I had to include. No, I didn't have any moral qualms.

LAB: With some of the stories - the man with the octagonal mansion, for example - how did you go about finding the information?

BR: It wasn't too hard, really. He's my favorite character in the book. I loved him. Probably excessively - I wrote too much about him, in retrospect. In fact, the fact that as much information exists about him as does is due in great part to Joey Smallwood. [Smallwood] traveled the length and breadth of Newfoundland when he was premier, and just gathered stuff. He acquired a lot of "Newfoundlandia," and amongst these were documents about the octagon castle, about Charles Henry Danielle. When he died, all this was passed on to the archives at Memorial Univer-

(continued on page 13)

I didn't try to do any convincing. I just told people what I was about: that I was writing a book on Canadian eccentrics; that I wasn't quite sure what eccentric meant; that they were suggested by someone, and would they mind talking to me.

Scorned and Beloved, a great disappointment to him. He took it far more seriously than I would have imagined, or intended.

I guess it's one of the dangers of working in a business like mine: it's all very public, and becomes ordinary to you. After a while, you forget that people who contact the show, or who you contact for other reasons, have more invested in it emotionally than you do. It's good to be reminded of from time to time: it stops you from taking anything lightly.

a good thing because it's already quite a long book. I have a sort of house rule that I won't read a book longer than 300 pages. (*Scorned and Beloved* runs 327 pages - ed.) It was never because they weren't interesting, but you always have to make choices: some stories didn't fit in, or I couldn't make them fit in. It was too disruptive; or too much of the same; or there wasn't enough focus. In a few cases because they were people who struck me as being genuinely troubled. I couldn't figure out how to write about them without making them

canadian literature

interview with anne michael

BY STEPHEN DINSMORE

(continued from page 9)

AM: For better or for worse, yes.

SD: Did your idea of faith change through writing the book?

AM: It's impossible for me not to be changed by the work I do. That's the sign that you've gotten very close to something.

SD: The young Jakob is mute and very wounded by his experiences. He eventually learns about language, poetry, history, and science with Athos, who becomes a surrogate father. Do you feel that poetic language can have a healing effect?

AM: I thought a lot about the language that I use in the



cause it would give the illusion of getting close to the horror. And language can never recreate that kind of experience. I thought so much about how I could get the reader, and get myself, as close as possible to these certain

book. In some ways the book could have been written in very brutal language, very ugly language. In a sense I thought that it would be more of a lie to do that, be-

things—things that it's natural to want to turn away from, whether it's the horror or the beauty. Certainly some kinds of love are also very painful to look at closely. What lan-

guage could I use to bring myself up as close as possible to the experience, that moment just before one wants to turn away? That's what I try to do with the language and images in the book.

So does language heal? I think it does, in surprising ways. I think that speaking certain things is very important. And it definitely has impact.

SD: Jakob becomes not only a poet but a translator. In writing the book, did you ever feel like a kind of translator, in the way that he is?

AM: Yes, in the sense of trying to write through something that words can never describe. Again and again. That, with the inevitable failure of language.

SD: Tell me something about how you chose the title, *Fugitive Pieces*.

AM: I have a lot of allusions there; but the first reason that I chose the title is because it is a literary term for manuscripts that we know are written but have never been found. Say, the eleventh novel by so-and-so; he wrote an eleventh one but we only have ten of them. No one has ever seen the eleventh. And in this case it's all the lost stories of the people whose names we don't even know. There's a sense of *that* being very much a part of history, these *pieces* of historical record.

SD: The characters themselves are fugitives. What would you say their move to Canada represents—why Canada?

AM: So many people,

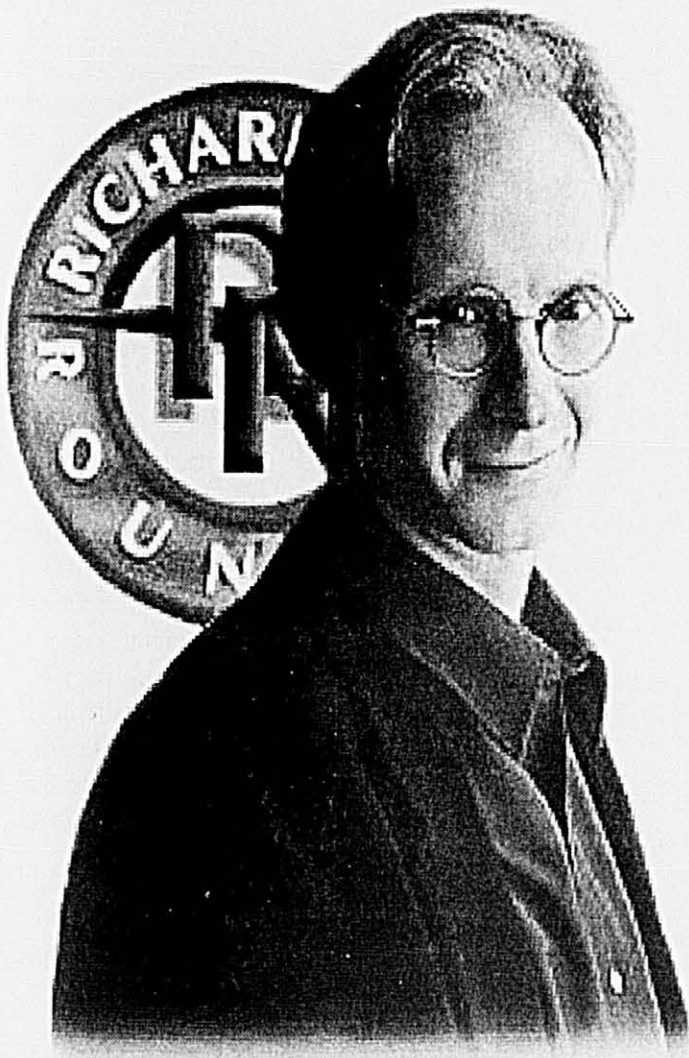
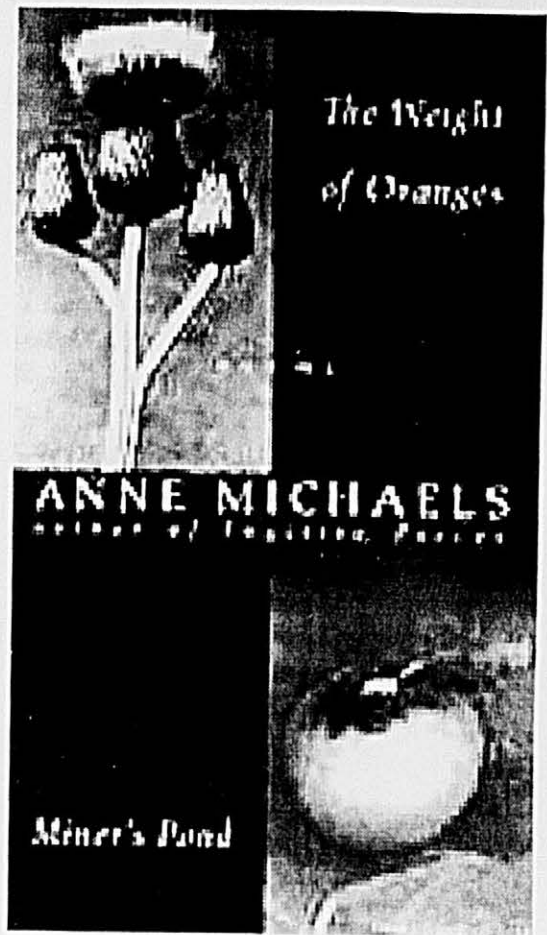
maybe especially in Toronto—or in Montreal too, of course—came because of the war, either before the war or after the war. It's complicated, one's relationship to a place where one is taken in and where one can try to begin again. All these lives were cut in half, cut in two. These people had to begin again. There's the sense of a stray life or stray biography. You have a relationship to a place that's now your own, and you're forging your life; but you also are very much joined to where you left. So it's a complicated relationship to the new country.

SD: What are you working on currently?

AM: I'm working on another novel; and I'm putting together a book of poems, some of which have been written over the last ten years or so. It's very pleasurable in the first stages of a book sometimes. Though I can't say that *Fugitive Pieces* was pleasurable at any point...[laughs]...but it was necessary. With this book there's the pleasure of still being in the delusionary state that one can solve all the problems. You haven't proved conclusively that you can't solve them.

SD: I'll look forward to reading and giving your next book—and I know my friends will too.

AM: That means so much to me.



(continued from page 12)

sity. The archivist there was also very interested in Danielle.

I think initially he was a little nervous, because he had the intent to write about Danielle: I made it very clear that I was just writing a chapter in a book. Much more could be said about [Danielle]. My point of researcher pride in this was a discovery in the public library. I'm sure people have known this is there, but there were a bunch of letters, which I describe at the end of the chapter. In the letters, his real name is revealed. In all the stuff I read about Danielle - and I think I read everything available to public sources - that was never mentioned.

LAB: I think I'm winding down on questions here. I've been happy to speak with you.

BR: Thanks.

Despite Richardson's lukewarm take on his own book, his words give a curious satisfaction, as when a coin, tested, rings true gold.

Recommendation: Read if you come from a city of 300'000 or less.

canadian
literature

canadian creative ^ space

Untitled

Unfocus my eyes.
slow my breathing.
and turn my head.
Something is buzzing
and blaring
and staring
at a point
just beyond my left shoulder
and the disinterested calm
before the heartsick storm
is a familiar end to the evening.

Stop the insanity.
(ha.)
Stop the sanity would be better,
stop the viewing,
this voyeuristic pose I adopt
while my sanity wraps itself
around my cute smile and screams
Come on, sharks!
here's the bleeding heart -
the tasty bloodbath awaits:

Just listen - you can hear the buzzing now
and the snapping, too
(of clenched jaws and narrowed eyes.)

Regain my balance.
Just in time to hear the starter's gun
And the frenzied hunt
for someone better looking than me
is on!
I watch it all too easily
from my self-deprecating vantage point,
the veteran sidekick:
sportscaster for the matchmaking event,
eager reporter with the late breaking story,
- eyes peeled
and camera rolling -
just itching to get the scoop
on which hot spring colours
and flirtatious attitudes
are best to catch your dream date this year.

And off they streak, instincts raging
And here she sits on the couch,
pretending that being one of the boys is good enough,
hell, that she IS one of those boys
who can always think faster than her
when she's trying to shed her reporter glasses
and put back in the cynic's lenses of wit
she thought she had.
But maybe they're in her other purse.

Calm this pulsing urge to cry out obscenely.
Stop this hissing in the back of my head
that sounds like my tires losing all their air
like an enormous reverse erection
like a good story i was going to tell him
that stopped in the middle because
that blaring was back
and the staring came next
and i was beaten by my own need
to look unaffected.

Erase the thousand, previous, identical memories.
Exorcise the haunting.
Oh, but the night is over now,
And the sharks have gone to sleep
And the blood has been spilled and mopped up
and wounds heal, don't they?
And there will always be another night,
another couch, another line that makes him
(or someone like him)
laugh and turn his head,
And the self-deceiving calm
before the self-perpetuating storm
will be postponed,
and she will think she can't be wrong all the time.
That she can't report on the happiness
of others forever.

But that buzzing,
that blaring,

that thundering...
The crashing lightening
and the falling barometer of
misguided desire....

And as that camera-hungry reporter
She will be there with the storm-watchers
Shooting from the hip
When the next one stares
beyond her shoulder,
catches the heroine's eye
And tells our patient runner-up
he appreciates her friendship,
really,
and goes to screw that one with the cute ass
in the back of the News At Nine crewbus.

- Anne-Michelle Tessier



photo by celine heinbecker

Jay Ingram

(cont'd. from page 6)

"There are many more stories out there," he replied. He proceeded to tell me an anecdote about Tutankhamen's uncle, Akhenaten, who was responsible for an attempted switch of Egyptian religion from polytheism to monotheism. His efforts made him a heretic, and his tomb was never found, but from what is known of his life, there is evidence in his behavior that he may have suffered from a rare disease known as Phralic's Syndrome. It's a neat topic, but I decided not to write about it."

When asked whether he could see writing a second collection of tales, he replied "I doubt it. I mean, it's always possible, but a second book probably wouldn't have the same effort and feeling behind it. Not for a while, at least."

His collection, however, needs no sequel: his writing is good, the tales are engaging, and Ingram has once again done what he is so good at: bringing science to the masses.

Recommendation: buy this book and try reading one story a night, at random, for three weeks.

Poetry In Motion

(cont'd. from page 10)

-nal language with a brief biography of the poet in both languages. Granted, even with a fair mix of French and English poems, there would be controversy. If William Johnson and Raymond Villeneuve can whip up a crowd of raging grannies and drunk patriotes to spar over the size of the fonts on the directory sign at Eaton's, then we can be assured of some sort of trouble - or at least some spray-painting of "101" on the English poems. This should be expected and ignored. If tried and true *indépendiste* Gerald Godin's poems can be published, then so can those of proud Canadians. As long as a conscious effort is made to keep the poems politically balanced, no reasonable person ought to be offended.

It seems silly that a project that would be inexpensive, promote culture both Canadian and Québécois, encourage local artists, give Montréal the air of a cultured city, enlighten public transit users and quite possibly help us understand each other's cultures would not be adopted. It's an idea that this city ought to have come up with itself, and it's about time Montréal began to introduce its own poetry to its people.

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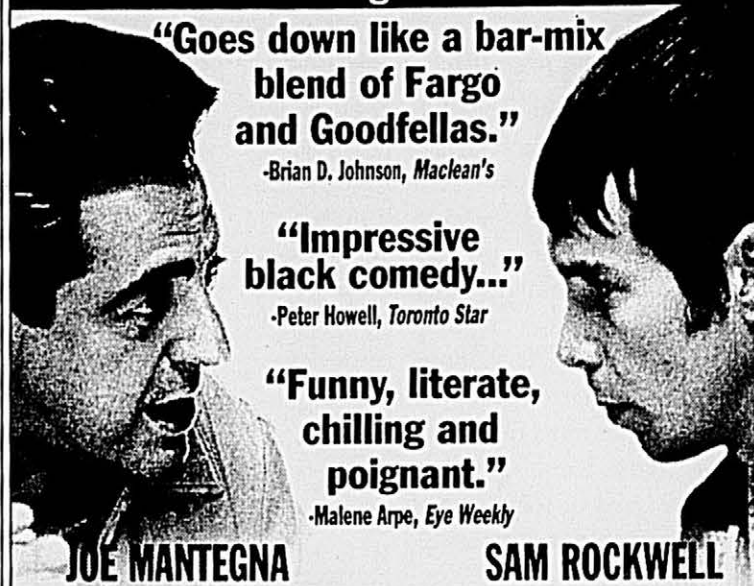
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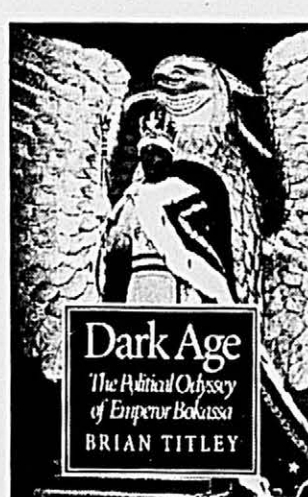
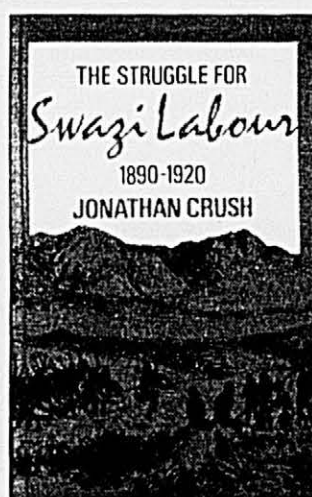
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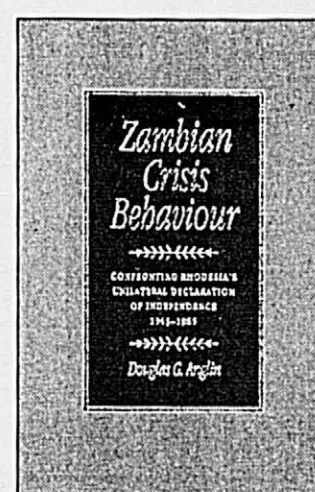
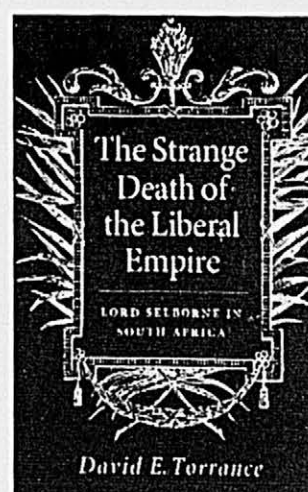
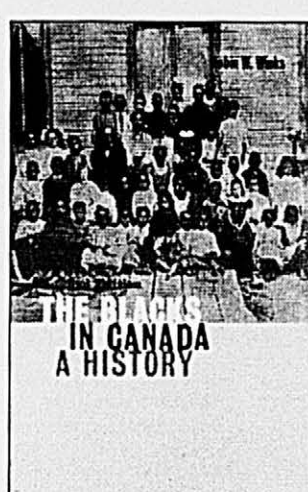
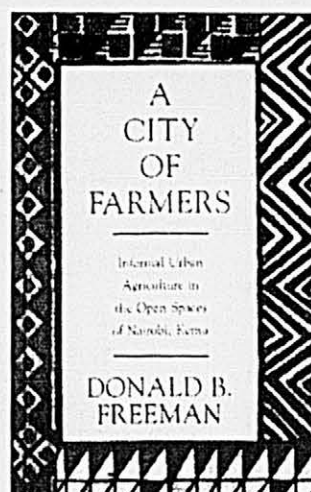
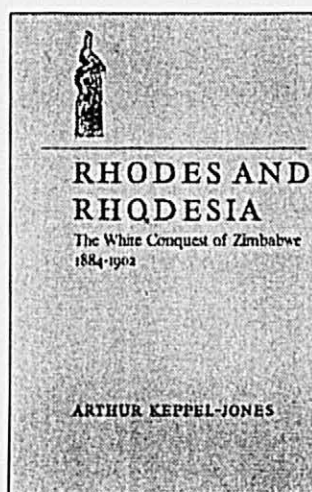
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